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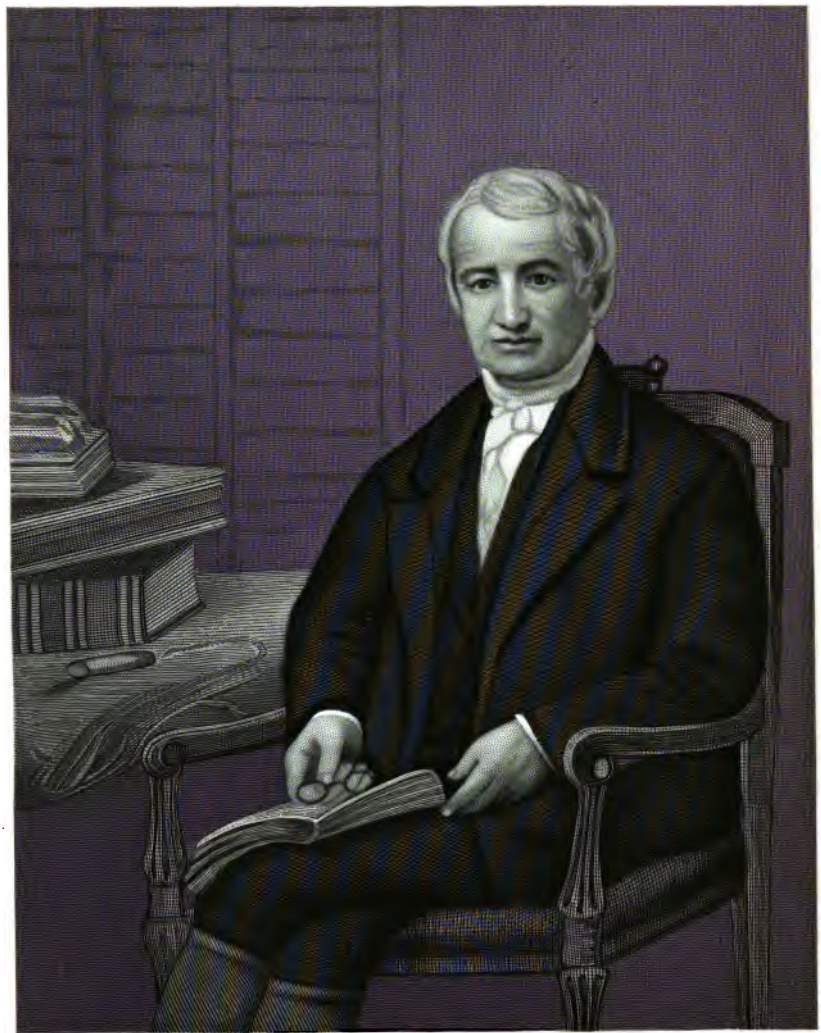

Engraved By J. J. Cade, New York

Thomas Robbins.

THOMAS ROBBINS, D.D.

A Biographical Sketch

REPRINTED FROM VOLUME III. OF THE MEMORIAL BIOGRAPHIES OF THE NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

BY

INCREASE N. TARBOX, D.D.

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BY THE

HON. HENRY BARNARD, LL.D.

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THOMAS ROBBINS

THOMAS ROBBINS was born in the town of Norfolk, Litchfield County, Connecticut, August 11, 1777.

This township lies in the northwestern portion of the State, touching Massachusetts on its northern line, and separated from New York only by the towns of Canaan and Salisbury. For more than a hundred years after the first English settlements in Connecticut, this section of the State remained comparatively unoccupied. The whole region is elevated and rough, partaking in this respect of the character of the Eastern Berkshire towns in Massachusetts. But the soil has a good natural strength, and is especially fitted for grazing. Norfolk was not incorporated as a town until 1758. The Congregational Church was organized in 1760, and in 1761 the Rev. Ammi Ruhamah Robbins, the father of Thomas, was ordained as the first minister of the town. He remained in this office for fifty-two years, until his death. He was twenty-one years old at his settlement, and there were at that time about sixty scattered families that had planted themselves on the hills and in the valleys of this large township.

The young minister, thus introduced to his life-work, was himself the son of a minister, and he was prepared for his sacred office by good native abilities, by choice and careful culture, and by a special urbanity and refinement of manners. He had been graduated the year before at Yale College, and meanwhile had studied theology in the

family of the famous Dr. Joseph Bellamy, of Bethlem, Connecticut. The year after his settlement he was united in marriage to Elizabeth Le Baron, of Plymouth, Massachusetts, she being then in her seventeenth year. The acquaintance was formed while he was teaching school in Plymouth, where his brother Chandler had just been settled in the ministry. When he brought his young wife to Norfolk, in the autumn of 1762, over the rough roads of that half-primitive region, he established a household which, in its immediate as well as in its remoter influences, was destined to be one of great importance to that town and to all the region round about. A civilizing and refining power was at once to go from it into those scattered dwellings among the hills, and by various and successive links of connection was to reach on into the generations to come. The young pastor was indebted for the singular name he bore to the intensely Biblical character of the age in which he was born. The groundwork of this name may be found in the book of the prophet Hosea, second chapter and first verse: "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah;" these two proper names meaning, "Thy people have obtained mercy."

Into this household were born thirteen children, five of whom died in infancy, and eight — six sons and two daughters — lived to mature life, and some of them to a ripe old age.

Going back now to the earlier generations and briefly tracing the family lines meeting in Thomas Robbins, we find them as follows. On the paternal side the earliest ancestor in this country was Richard Robbins, who had his home in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1639. He and his wife Rebecca were admitted to the Charlestown church, May 24. 1640, and on the following Sunday, May 31, their son John was baptized. The family soon removed to Cambridge. We have the record of a son

Samuel, who was born in Cambridge, May 22, 1643. Two other children, Nathaniel and Rebecca, were baptized at Cambridge, though the dates of their baptism are lost. But we know by the records that this son Nathaniel died in 1719, at the age of seventy, so that the year of his birth seems to have been 1649. The family made Cambridge its home for generations. Richard Robbins shared in the division of the church lands in 1652, receiving as his portion eighty acres. In 1678 Richard gave deeds of land to his sons, — to Samuel thirty-six acres, to Nathaniel thirty-four acres, and a year or two later to Rebecca and her husband, John Woodward, thirty acres. The names of the family through the early generations are found in Harris's Cambridge Epitaphs.

Nathaniel, the son of Richard, married, August 4, 1669, Mary Brazier, and had eight children, of whom one bore his father's name.

This second Nathaniel, born February 28, 1677–8, married, first, Hannah Chandler, probably in 1695, and upon her death, in 1718, he married Mrs. Mary Prentice. Hannah Chandler was the mother of his nine children, unless the youngest daughter, Sarah, be an exception. The date of her birth is not given. He died January 26, 1761–2.

Among his sons was Philemon, born September 19, 1709. He was graduated at Harvard College in 1729, and afterwards studied theology with Dr. Nathaniel Appleton, of Cambridge. On the 7th of February, 1732, he was ordained pastor at Branford, Connecticut, where he continued in the ministry forty-nine years, till his death, August 13, 1781. Of his nine children three were sons, all of whom were set upon a course of public education. One of them died while in college, and the other two were the Rev. Dr. Chandler Robbins of Plymouth, Massachusetts, and the Rev. Ammi Ruhamah, the Norfolk pastor, already spoken of.

On the maternal side Dr. Robbins was descended from

the illustrious William Bradford, Governor of Plymouth Colony, by his second wife, Mrs. Alice Southworth, whose maiden name was Carpenter.

Their son, William Bradford, was born June 17th, 1624. He was three times married, his last wife being Mrs. Mary Holmes, widow of the Rev. John Holmes, minister of Duxbury. Her maiden name was Atwood.

David Bradford, their son, was born when his father was well advanced in life, making the interval longer between the birth of the father and the son than is usual. He was the fourteenth child in the family. He married, in 1714, Elizabeth Finney.

Lydia Bradford, daughter of David and Elizabeth, was born December 23, 1719. She was first married, in 1740, to Elkanah Cushman, who soon died. In 1743 she was again married to Dr. Lazarus Le Baron, of Plymouth. He was the son of Francis Le Baron, a surgeon on board a French privateer, which was wrecked in Buzzard's Bay. Thrown thus upon a strange shore, he settled as a physician in Plymouth in 1696.

Elizabeth, daughter of Lazarus and Lydia Le Baron, was born December 21, 1745, and became the wife of the Norfolk minister, as already mentioned.

Thus we find Dr. Robbins, alike on the paternal and maternal lines of descent, in the sixth generation from the first settlers in this country.

He was born in the time of the Revolutionary struggle. In 1776, the year before his birth, his father went as chaplain in the Northern army to Canada. He was with this army when the small-pox made such ravages in it.

As years passed on, the boy Thomas was fitted for college in his father's house, having for his companions in study other young scholars, who came to the parsonage at Norfolk for their college preparation. This house was like a little academy for that northwestern portion of Connecticut. In the tribute which the son, in later years,

prepared for Sprague's Annals, he says of his father: "With his ministerial labors he connected those of a teacher, having almost always a greater or less number of students with him fitting for college." At the age of fifteen, in 1792, he entered the Freshman class in Yale College, and was there during the last years of President Stiles's administration. At the end of his Junior year he left Yale and entered the Senior class at Williams College, where he was graduated with honor in 1796. Williams College was then in its very infancy. Only one class had been graduated at the time Mr. Robbins entered the institution. This new College was so located as naturally to attract the interest and sympathy of Northwestern Connecticut. It was not, therefore, from any dissatisfaction with Yale, or from any trouble which arose there, that young Robbins went thence to Williams, but rather to testify, on the part of himself and family, an interest in the new enterprise. His father had already become one of the Trustees of the institution, elected in 1794.

There were but six members in his class at Williams His graduating day was September 7, 1796. The commencement at Yale was one week later, September 14. After finishing his course at Williams, and receiving his diploma, he went back to New Haven, and was also graduated with his class at that institution. His name stands on the Triennial Catalogues both of Yale and Williams for the year 1796. His class at Yale numbered thirty-four, and was the first class graduated under President Dwight, who had been inaugurated at the Commencement the year before. Some of the more conspicuous of Mr. Robbins's classmates at Yale were Professor Benjamin Silliman, LL. D., the Rev. Henry Davis, D. D., President of Hamilton College, and Professor Bancroft Fowler, of Bangor Theological Seminary. One member of his class, noted for his longevity, was the venerable Timothy Bishop of New Haven, who died in 1873, seventy-seven years after his graduation.

For several years after leaving college, Mr. Robbins was chiefly employed as a teacher, at the same time pursuing theological studies. He went in June, 1797, to reside in the family of Dr. Stephen West, of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He was licensed to preach by the Litchfield North Association, September 25, 1798. He still continued to teach and also to supply vacant pulpits. He had charge of the academy at Danbury, Connecticut, from 1799 to 1802. Meanwhile he had declined invitations from several parishes. In 1803, he accepted an appointment from the Missionary Society of Connecticut to labor among the new settlements in Ohio. That society, organized in 1798, was supporting some twelve or fifteen missionaries among the new settlements in Vermont, New York, Michigan, and Ohio. From the report of this society for the year 1803 we take the following item.

"Mr. Thomas Robbins, of Norfolk, was appointed a missionary, in May last, to supply the place of Mr. Chapman in New Connecticut. On the 20th of July following, he was ordained by the North Consociation of Litchfield County, as preparatory to his entering upon his mission. He set out from Norfolk for New Connecticut on the 25th of August. A letter has been received from him dated Carlisle (Penn.), October 10th, about forty days from the time he left Norfolk, in which he writes, 'Rode 470 miles, — preached 39 times, — attended two conferences, administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper once, — visited sick persons, — catechised children, and endeavored to give much instruction.'

"Mr. Robbins will labor in concert with Mr. Badger, and with a third missionary who is soon to be sent there."

He labored in this field three years, and in co-operation with his fellow-workers organized several of the early churches of Ohio. It was while here that he preached the ordination sermon of his cousin, the Rev. Samuel Prince Robbins, son of Dr. Chandler Robbins of Plymouth. A

brief notice of this service is found in the sixth volume of the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, as follows: —

"Ordained on Wednesday, the 8th day of January last (1805), over the first religious Congregational Society in Marietta, Ohio, the Rev. Samuel Prince Robbins. The public services of the occasion were performed in a solemn and impressive manner. The Rev. Jacob Lindsly made the introductory prayer. The Rev. Thomas Robbins, of Connecticut, preached the sermon."

He returned from this missionary life in 1806, with his health considerably impaired, by reason of the hardships and exposures of such a work. Preaching for three years in various places, in 1809 he accepted a call from the First Ecclesiastical Parish in East Windsor. This was the parish where Timothy Edwards commenced preaching as the first minister, in 1694, continuing sixty-four years, till his death in 1758. Here the celebrated Jonathan Edwards was born, in 1703, and was fitted for college in his father's house, as were also a large number of young men from the surrounding towns. The memories of the past clustered about the parish at the time Mr. Robbins began his labors. Here Roger Wolcott had lived, one of the distinguished Colonial Governors of Connecticut, and from his family men were raised up from generation to generation for distinguished public service in state affairs and in national affairs, as well as in the Church of Christ.

The writer, born in East Windsor, in the North (or Second) Parish, where the Rev. Shubael Bartlett was minister for fifty years, well remembers Dr. Robbins, as he used to appear in the pulpit from 1820 to 1827. At that time, his brother, the Rev. Francis L. Robbins, was the pastor in the adjoining town of Enfield, on the north, so that these two brothers were more convenient for exchanges than almost any other of the neighboring ministers. They were both very frequently in Mr. Bartlett's pulpit. One sermon preached by the Rev. Thomas Robbins, about the

year 1825, from Romans ii. 4, for some reason, made a peculiar impression upon the childish mind. There was a tenderness in the train of thought and in the manner of the preacher that awakened the emotions and drew a half tearful attention to the sermon.

From early life Dr. Robbins was a lover of books. As a young man, he discovered an antiquarian taste far more rare in his generation than at the present time. He was in some sense a pioneer in a class of studies and researches now shared by many persons. It was about the time of his settlement at East Windsor that the plan of forming a large and carefully selected library began to take a practical shape in his mind. It was this turn of his life that led Mr. Bartlett, his brother minister in the North Parish, to say, with his Christian gentleness and patriarchal simplicity, "Brother Robbins thought he could have either a wife or a library, and he very unwisely chose the latter, — *very unwisely*." The Hon. Henry Barnard was President of the Connecticut Historical Society at the time of Dr. Robbins's death. The obituary notice which he prepared, and which was published in the eighth number of the third volume of the American Journal of Education, gives a brief history of the growth of this library.

"He commenced his collection while in college, by preserving his text-books, and in 1809 made a formal beginning of a permanent library, by making a catalogue of his entire stock, consisting of one hundred and thirty volumes, with a determination that he would add at least one hundred volumes a year as long as he should live. He consecrated his design by invoking the blessing of God upon it. . . . . From this small and pious beginning, in 1809, by denying himself all superfluities out of a modest income, Dr. Robbins persevered, adding year by year at least one hundred volumes to his collection, till, instead of a few shelves in a single case, we now see this spacious hall filled with many thousands of choice and valuable books."

Mr. Robbins was, at his own request, in 1827, dis-

missed from his parish in East Windsor. After three years of miscellaneous preaching, he was installed pastor of the First Church in Stratford, Connecticut, in 1830. He remained here but one year. In 1831, he accepted a call from the Congregational Church at Mattapoisett, a parish in the town of Rochester, Massachusetts, where he remained thirteen years.

It was in 1844 that the process began by which his valuable collection of books and pamphlets eventually became the property of the Connecticut Historical Society at Hartford. Some movement had been made in the Rhode Island Legislature toward the purchase of the collection as a foundation for a State Library. Mr. Barnard, from whom we have quoted, was at that time Commissioner of the Public Schools of Rhode Island. He was thoroughly in the plan for purchasing the library for that State, and wrought earnestly to bring about that result. But the scheme proving unsuccessful before the Legislature, he, being a native of Hartford, and interested in its public institutions, now felt himself at liberty to try and secure the treasure for the Connecticut Historical Society. We quote from a note appended to the obituary notice to which we have already made reference.

"On the same day Mr. Barnard drove over to Mattapoisett, and after an interview of an hour, finding that Dr. Robbins's health required a cessation of pastoral duties, gave his personal obligation for a salary for five years, equal to that which he was then receiving as pastor, if he would remove to Hartford with his library, and become librarian of the Connecticut Historical Society. In the course of the week following, he visited Hartford, raised among the members of the Society and the personal friends of Dr. Robbins the sum required, and presented the matter to the sanction of the Society, which was promptly and cordially given. The annual payment for five years was subsequently converted into an annuity, in consideration of which Dr. Robbins, of his own accord, transferred his library to the Society."

It may be added, that he also gave the Society the sum of $3,000, to aid in the care of the books and enlargement of the resources of the institution. This library is rich in old and choice pamphlets, in a large collection of Bibles, and in many fine editions of the works of the early Christian Fathers.

He greatly enjoyed the new life upon which he had now entered. His library was deposited in the Wadsworth Atheneum, at Hartford. He was already sixty-seven years old, and it was a great pleasure thus to find a secure home and resting-place in his old age. He lived with his books, which for so many years he had been laboriously gathering, and which had now been promoted to a place of honor and dignity. He took delight in the society of students and scholars, and nothing gave him greater satisfaction than to unfold to them the choice riches of his collection. Dr. Barnard says of him, in this connection: "Here, for ten years, with gradually failing strength, he might be seen at our monthly meetings, and day by day welcoming, with courteous attentions, the citizen and stranger to these rooms, and explaining, with almost the personal interest of an eyewitness to the reality, these memorials of a past age, — himself an object of no less interest to the visitor."

Dr. Robbins inherited from his father and mother an uncommon gentleness and courtesy of manner. He was patient and free from all irritability, so that the stranger was at once at ease in his presence.

He received his title of D. D. from Harvard College in 1838. He was, from 1842 to 1853, one of the Trustees of Williams College.

He was in some sense, perhaps, the originator of the Connecticut Historical Society, as he seems to have made the first suggestion of such an institution in an address given at Hartford, in 1822. Three years later the Society was formed, and he was among the first incorporators,

with such men as John Trumbull and the Hon. Thomas Day as associates. He was also a member of the American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, and of the New England Historic Genealogical Society of Boston, to which he was admitted a corresponding member, February 18, 1847. He was deeply interested in the charitable institutions of Hartford, — the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, and the Retreat for the Insane, and others.

Dr. Robbins was not known as a public writer, to any large extent, but in the course of his long life he furnished much miscellaneous matter for the press. The following may not be a complete list of his publications, though it is as nearly so as we have been able to make it, and embraces certainly the chief of his works.

1. An Oration occasioned by the Death of General Washington, delivered at Danbury, Connecticut, Jan. 2, 1800, with a Sketch of his Life. Danbury. pp. 16.

Two or three editions were published. This was four years after leaving college, and while he was Principal of the Danbury Academy.

2. A Century Sermon, 1801. Danbury.

3. Fast Sermon. Middletown, 1815. pp. 21.

4. Sermon at the Interment of the Rev. Nehemiah Prudden. Hartford, 1816. pp. 19.

5. Sermons on the Divinity of Christ. Preached at East Windsor. Hartford, 1820.

6. Sermon at Installation of the Rev. E. L. Clark, 1820.

7. Sermon to the Military at Hartford, 1822.

8. Sermon on the Death of E. B. Cook, 1823.

9. View of all Religions. 3d edition, 1824. 12mo.

10. The Dying Believer committing his Soul to Christ. Sermon on the Death of Mrs. Cynthia Fairchild. Hartford, 1824.

11. Sermon at Installation of the Rev. E. Burt, 1825.

12. Sermon at the Funeral of the Rev. Lemuel Le Baron. New Bedford, 1837. pp. 20.

13. Historical View of the First Planters of New England. Hartford, 1st edition, 1815; 2d edition, 1843, pp. 300.

This work was first published in twenty successive numbers

of the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine. They were written at the suggestion of Dr. Nathan Strong, of Hartford, the editor of the Magazine, and were commenced in the eleventh volume of that work.

14. Dr. Robbins was also the editor of the first (1820) and second (1853) American editions of Mather's Magnalia. He wrote the prefaces and explanatory notes. Before the American edition of 1820 was published, we had no copy of this work except the large English edition of 1702, which was becoming rare and costly.

15. He furnished the articles upon his father, Ammi Ruhamah, and his grandfather, Philemon Robbins, in Dr. Sprague's Annals of the American Pulpit. In addition, he assisted Dr. Sprague, by original letters, in illustrating the lives of the Rev. Cotton Mather Smith, Dr. Chandler Robbins, Rev. Nathaniel Taylor, Dr. David McClure, and Dr. Nathan Strong.

16. He also revised and continued Tytler's Elements of General History, 1815.

With regard to published writings illustrating his life, we know of nothing so complete as the obituary article of Dr. Barnard, already freely referred to. The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine contains frequent references to him, as well as articles from his pen. There are many paragraphs to be found there illustrating his earlier public services.

With his library at Hartford may be found a set of interleaved almanacs, now bound in twelve handsome volumes, in which he kept a record of his life for fifty-eight years. This work was begun just as he was ready to graduate from Williams College. The first entry is September 1, 1796, and is as follows: "Engaged in committing my pieces for Commencement." The last entry was March 6, 1854, when, at the age of seventy-six, the infirmities of years were fast settling upon him. The record is as follows: "Received a dividend from the Phœnix Bank of $60. I have been a member of that body from its beginning. They do poorly at Congress, favoring sla-

very. The South generally prevail." For a minute study of his life there is nothing, of course, which can compare with this diary. Moreover, the record will be found exceedingly useful for any historian who is threading his way through the events of the first half of the present century.

There are two pictures of Dr. Robbins at the rooms of the Connecticut Historical Society; one, of moderate merit, taken in his early manhood; the other, a superb painting, which the Society had taken while he was in a vigorous old age.

We have already had glimpses of his tastes and peculiarities. In addition, a few sentences from a letter, written by one of his nieces, will suffice. She says: —

> "My Uncle Thomas always dressed in the old-time black-satin tights, silk stockings, knee and shoe buckles, or with white-topped boots. These he always wished to have brushed with particular care, lest the white leather should become soiled. His courtesy of manner, prompted by the kindness of his nature, was such, that all who came in contact with him took great pleasure in serving him. Those who had personal relations with him could not fail to love him. . . . . He watched the educational progress of his nephews and nieces with great interest."

It has been implied throughout this article, though not perhaps definitely stated, that Dr. Robbins was never married. Whether wisely or unwisely, he deliberately gave up the pleasures of domestic life, that he might follow out his favorite scheme of a great library. He well knew that the small salary of a country minister would not suffice to cover the expenses of both, and he chose the library.

But in this connection it is proper to say, that a delightful home in his native town was always ready for him until the day of his death. Whatever his outward fortunes might be, he was sure of a hearty welcome from

his kindred. His sister Sarah, two years younger than himself, had married early in life Joseph Battell, Esq., of Norfolk, and in this home of wealth and culture, where nephews and nieces abounded, a generous hospitality was ever extended to him. One of the nieces became the wife of the Rev. Joseph Eldridge, D.D., another life-long minister of Norfolk, (1832–1874,) and the cheerful parsonage-house of Norfolk stood invitingly open. Had he been more of a stranger and outcast in the earth, he would doubtless have suffered more from the absence of domestic joys, for his nature was one craving sympathy and companionship.

He faded away, at last, in a calm and serene old age. There was no sharp crisis of disease. For four or five years, the powers of his mind and body gradually weakened and decayed. He died in the town of Colebrook, adjoining Norfolk, at the house of his niece, Mrs. Elizabeth Robbins Allen, September 13, 1856, at the age of seventy-nine.

HON. HENRY BARNARD'S ADDRESS

THE funeral of Dr. Robbins took place at the Centre Church, Hartford, Connecticut, at 5 o'clock P.M., Sept. 16, 1856. The venerable Rev. JOEL HAWES, D.D., officiated. A half hour before the funeral, the members of the Connecticut Historical Society assembled at their library, preparatory to going in a body to attend the funeral services; and there the President of the Society, Hon. HENRY BARNARD, made the following just and fitting address: —

GENTLEMEN, — We have assembled on this occasion, by special summons, to join in an appropriate expression of our grateful remembrance of the Rev. Thomas Robbins, D.D., — one of the earliest and best friends of the Society, — whose decease and funeral have been almost simultaneously announced to us. The departure of this venerable Christian pastor, whose ministrations for a half century have been familiar to the pulpits of this city and State, and whose life, presence, and teachings have seemed a connecting link between the present generation and the Puritan period of New England history, would at any time have arrested the sorrowing attention of all who seek in the past the roots of our present prosperity. But in this venerable Christian pastor we, brethren, recognize a pioneer in historical and antiquarian research in this State, — one of the founders of this Society; one named in the act of its incorporation; one of its earliest office-bearers; and one whose valuable collection of

books, pamphlets, and historical memorials constitute the treasure and attraction of our library and museum.

And to add to his claims to our grateful remembrance, Dr. Robbins has by his will made the Connecticut Historical Society the trustee of his property (a no inconsiderable sum), by which his valuable collection of biblical, ecclesiastical, and antiquarian literature will be preserved and gradually augmented, — an ever-enduring monument of his piety, patriotism, and zeal for learning, and a source of ever-widening instruction and pleasure to generation after generation. A brief notice of the library, and of his and its connection with the Connecticut Historical Society cannot be considered an inappropriate introduction to the resolutions which will be submitted to your consideration.

The books which fill these numerous alcoves and shelves, and these interesting memorials of "the piety, bravery, and domestic life of the fathers of Connecticut and New England," were the gatherings of nearly fifty years' explorations of the garrets, chests, and libraries of the old families of Connecticut and the "Old Colony," as well as the purchases of antiquarian booksellers and collectors. Many of these pamphlets are very rare and valuable, and are often consulted by scholars interested in the literary, ecclesiastical, and civil history of New England.

The books were not purchased at once, out of the abundance of a largely inherited fortune, or from year to year out of the surplus of a large salary. Nor were they collected for the owner's sole or temporary gratification. Dr. Robbins has always been a home missionary, or the pastor of a country parish. He began his collection while in college, by preserving his text-books; and in 1809 made a formal beginning of a permanent library, by making a catalogue of his entire stock, consisting of one hundred and thirty volumes, with the determination

that he would add at least one hundred volumes a year as long as he should live. He consecrated his design by invoking the blessing of God upon it, and declared in writing on the first leaf of his catalogue the following to be his objects: —

"*First*, To assist the divinity student in the investigation of the Holy Scriptures, in the study of the history of the Church of Christ, and in such general services as may enable him to become an able and faithful minister of the gospel of salvation."

"*Second*, To assist the lover of history in his researches to discover the character of the Most High, and of man in the various events of Divine Providence. The design is now committed to God. I pray for His holy approbation and blessing."

From this small and pious beginning in 1809, by denying himself all superfluities, out of a modest income Dr. Robbins persevered, adding year by year at least one hundred volumes to his collection; till instead of a few shelves in a single case, we now see this spacious hall filled with many thousands of choice and valuable books.

How much purer and higher has been his satisfaction from year to year, in adding to the glorious company of the great and good coming to him across oceans of space and time, — his instructors in the noble themes which have occupied his meditation, his pen, and his voice for nearly half a century; his resort in hours of solitude, his recreation after severe labor, and his solace in periods of trial and affliction, — than if he had expended his earnings and savings on things that perish with the using!

It was his intention from the start, that his collection should be kept entire after his death, and pass, with such conditions as should appear best calculated to secure its

preservation and gradual increase, into the safe keeping of some chartered institution; and by arrangement entered into twelve years ago, his long-cherished purpose was consummated by this Society's becoming at first the trustee, and afterward the owner, of his valuable collections. By this arrangement he had the satisfaction in his own lifetime to see his entire library displayed, as it had never been before, in one of the noblest rooms of the most substantially built edifice in the State, — safe from the hazards of fire, and from the vicissitudes which attach to the property of individuals, and committed forever to the custody of a Society which, under the laws of the commonwealth, and in the patriotism of its citizens, is destined, we trust, to a permanent existence and an ever-widening usefulness. And more than this: he was able to retire from his chosen field of labor, when he could no longer serve his Master as a Christian pastor from his failing strength, and, without any apprehension that the evening of his life would be clouded by want or neglect, here, in our midst, where he was universally respected, with those facilities and helps which his zeal and self-denial had collected, to give himself up to those historical and antiquarian studies and pursuits which he loved so well, and which he had begun so early in his career.

Dr. Robbins was for a long time almost the only collector in the State of pamphlets and memorials of the past; and as far back as 1811, in the Connecticut "Evangelical Magazine," he began a series of papers on the divines and statesmen of our early history, which were afterward collected and published in a volume entitled, "First Planters of New England." In every place where he ministered, he devoted himself to the elucidation of its local and ecclesiastical history.

In 1822, in an address delivered in this city on the Fourth of July, before a number of military companies,

he urged the formation of an "Historical Society as a depository of ancient books, pamphlets, manuscripts, and temporary publications," and that it should be done here, "in this, the oldest town in the State." Whether growing out of this suggestion or not, I cannot say; but three years later he had the satisfaction of seeing his name among the incorporators of the Connecticut Historical Society, and of being associated with the venerable John Trumbull and the Hon. Thomas Day among the officers of the institution. Called a few years later out of the State, he was not permitted to labor here in behalf of its objects; but he carried his antiquarian taste and labors with him, which were recognized by his being elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society, at Worcester.

In 1844, it was my good fortune to consummate on my own responsibility an arrangement by which Dr. Robbins became the librarian of our Society, and removed to these rooms, as has been before stated, his valuable library, and gave to us his entire collection of pamphlets, amounting to the number of over five thousand. And here, for ten years, with gradually failing strength, he might be seen at our monthly meetings, and day by day welcoming, with courteous attentions, the citizen and stranger to these rooms, and explaining, with almost the personal interest of an eye-witness to the reality, these memorials of a past age, — himself an object of no less interest to the visitor. But by degrees the failing memory, the hesitating step, the dim eye, satisfied him, as well as his best friends, that his work on earth was finished, and he retired to the country, — to the neighborhood where he was born; and there his spirit gradually passed away, like the twilight of a long summer-day, into that solemn darkness which mortal eye cannot pierce, but which to him, we doubt not, is lit up by the radiance of a never-ending noon.

It would be unjust, even in these brief remarks, not to notice his life-long interest in the prosperity of our

New England colleges, and his constant care of the common school in every place where he ministered as pastor. He was seldom absent from the Commencement exercises of Yale and Williams, and never failed to visit once, and generally twice, every district school in his parish during each season of schooling. He was a member of the first society formed in this country to improve common schools; and, on the nomination of Governor Everett, was appointed a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, on its establishment in 1837.

Dr. Robbins took an active part in all the religious and benevolent movements of the day, and in the foundation of most of the institutions of charity which adorn and bless our city. He was particularly active in commending the cause of the insane to individual and legislative aid, and was invited by Dr. Todd and the Trustees to pronounce a discourse on the dedication of the Retreat for that class.

Before we go out hence to pay our last tribute of respect to our deceased brother and venerable friend, by joining in the funeral services and following his body to the tomb, let us unite in placing on our records our high appreciation of his pure, useful, and Christian life, as also our grateful remembrance of his many services to the cause of sound learning and intelligent piety, especially in opening to the student of history and the Bible this valuable and, we trust, ever-increasing library.

The following resolutions were then adopted: —

Whereas, It has pleased Almighty God to call from his earthly labors our late librarian, the Rev. Thomas Robbins, Doctor of Divinity, —

Resolved, That in his death the Connecticut Historical Society has lost one of its original projectors, founders, and office-bearers, whose antiquarian zeal did much to enlist others in the promotion of its objects, and whose reverence for God's

Word and ways has led to the acquisition of a valuable library, and of large historical material, into the possession of which this Society has entered, with the means bequeathed by him to make the same still more valuable "to the student of the Holy Scriptures, and the lover of history, in his researches to discover the character of the Most High, and of man in the various events of Divine Providence."

Resolved, That as a Christian pastor we honor his memory as at once devoted and exemplary, — firm in his own convictions, and candid and liberal towards those who differed from him in opinion, and in all transactions with others eminent for his Christian courtesy and kindness.

Resolved, That as a Society we will proceed hence to the Centre Church, to assist in the funeral solemnities, and to follow his body to its last resting-place.